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Dear Friends:

I am writing to provide another update about the Innovation Schools initiative, and also to share additional information about the resources that are available to support the establishment of Innovation Schools in districts across Massachusetts.

Over the past several months, the Executive Office of Education (EOE) and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) created different opportunities to learn more about the Innovation School model and the locally-based approval process.

In late October and early November, we conducted four information sessions at Worcester State University, Holyoke Community College, Bridgewater State University, and the Museum of Science, and over 200 educators and community members attended these events. In addition to receiving general information about this initiative from EOE and ESE staff members as well as representatives of state associations, the attendees had the opportunity to hear from educators who are currently operating different types of autonomous schools. For example, they received insightful advice about using autonomy and flexibility to significantly improve student achievement; collaborating with school, district, and community partners; and sustaining innovative strategies over time. I would like to thank our higher education partners and the Museum of Science for hosting these events, and would especially like to thank all of the panelists and state representatives for their important contributions to the discussions.

As a follow-up to the information sessions, in early December we conducted over 30 working sessions for teams representing schools, districts, and communities across Massachusetts. Team members (including teachers, principals, district administrators, school committee members, higher education representatives, and community partners) received targeted technical assistance about the development of initial prospectuses and innovation plans, and also additional guidance about the approval process. I am pleased that so many communities are exploring the possibility of establishing Innovation Schools, and am especially excited about the creative strategies that were presented by the teams. Thank you to ESE and Worcester State University for hosting these sessions, and special thanks to the consultants (including two former superintendents and

staff members at the Center for Collaborative Education) for sharing their considerable expertise and providing continued support.

As you know, the Innovation School model is cost-neutral with regard to the longer-term operation of schools; the total allocation per school plus budget flexibility plus the discretion to pursue supplementary funding opportunities provide the operators of Innovation Schools with the authority and flexibility to allocate resources differently. However, to support initial planning activities and the successful implementation of creative and bold strategies for one year of operation, the EOE and ESE will award two types of planning and implementation grants to eligible applicants and partner districts.

I am pleased to inform you that the EOE has received a grant of \$650,000 from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to support the establishment of Innovation Schools in districts across the state. This grant supplements the \$1.5 million from the Race to the Top award for planning and implementation grants; attached is a fact sheet that provides detailed information about the two funding opportunities, and the Requests for Proposals have been posted at the following websites: <http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/Grants/grants11/rfp/202.html> and <http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/Grants/grants11/rfp/154.html>. In addition, we have received generous funding from The Boston Foundation and the Nellie Mae Foundation, and we greatly appreciate our continued partnership with these local stakeholders.

We have the opportunity to do truly bold and creative work in Massachusetts, and the EOE and ESE will continue to provide information and guidance about this important initiative. If you have any questions or need additional information about the Innovation School model, approval process, planning and implementation grants, or technical assistance, please contact Saeyun Lee (saeyun.lee@state.ma.us, 617.979.8351) or Nick Martinelli (nicholas.martinelli@state.ma.us, 617.979.8345) at the EOE. Thank you for your continued interest in the Innovation Schools initiative, and best wishes for the coming year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Paul Reville", with a stylized, cursive script.

Paul Reville
Secretary of Education